

California State Parks

Central Valley Vision Update: What the Department is Hearing

In the summer of 2003, State Parks Director Ruth Coleman initiated the Department's Central Valley Vision to provide a 20-year road map for State Park actions to focus on increasing service and relevancy to Valley residents and visitors. Within the Great Central Valley (San Joaquin Valley, Sacramento Valley and the Delta region), the Department operates and maintains 32 state park units representing just 7% of the total state park system acreage.

In the span of only forty years, the Valley will experience phenomenal development and today is in the midst of profound demographic, economic and social change brought on by the region's explosive population growth. Today roughly 5.5 million residents call the Valley home. By the year 2040, according to the Department of Finance, the Valley is projected to have more than 11.5 million residents.

The Department's Central Valley Vision is an ambitious strategy to identify current and near term Department-wide actions to meet the public's needs through a renewed effort to build economic and volunteer partnerships, park developments, upgrade facilities and acquire new park lands. Although there are no funds available today for large scale implementation of the Central Valley Vision, Director Coleman's goal is to prepare for such a time when funding becomes available.

At several spring 2005 public outreach meetings, staff asked: What is important in the Central Valley that should be protected and interpreted as a unit of the State Park System before it's lost? *Which natural, historical and cultural resources and features should be protected before they vanish? What special stories need to be told and where are the places that need to be protected in order to tell them? What recreational facilities of the kind found in State Parks should be developed and where?*

The spring 2005 Central Valley Vision outreach meetings identified a need to create and strengthen economic and volunteer partnerships, upgrade existing facilities and acquire new park lands. When asked the questions noted above, Department staff heard numerous interesting and well-thought out suggestions, including:

1. Expand recreation facilities at existing valley parks to accommodate: day use, picnicking, hiking, camping, interpretive programs and facilities, canoeing/kayaking, fishing, motorized boating, off-road vehicles and biking and walking trails to accommodate larger group activities primarily along river corridors, the Delta region and reservoirs (where appropriate).
2. Expand landholdings at existing parks and acquire new parklands, particularly along major river corridors where an opportunity exists to link state parks and other lands in public ownership; for example the Delta region, Mokelumne River, Cache Creek and the Tuolumne River.

In addition to the suggested land expansions, consider including sites that voluntarily provide land preservation agreements, link trail corridors, lands that provide buffer zones to existing parks such as working farms and ranches, and those that are located along major transportation routes, such as Interstate 5 and Highway 99.

3. Acquire key cultural, historical, natural and recreation lands and corridors: Natural areas including blue oak and sycamore woodlands, geological and paleontological sites, vernal pools, wetlands, canyon-

lands, rolling hills, indigenous grasslands and riparian habitat and those key linkages that provide access to valuable resource lands; and multi-use trails and lands that provide for day use and camping experiences.

4. Preserve and interpret the rich history of the Valley, such as, those that “tell a story” or are a historic theme, event or activity, such as trade routes, railroad and river transportation routes and trails, Dust Bowl history, migrant farm workers, immigrant stories, mining hydrology, oil industry, flood control and the building of the California aqueduct and aviation,. In addition, the full history of California’s native people, including prehistoric rock art, preservation of sacred sites; and the story of the agricultural industry and its profound impact on the Valley.

5. Strengthen partnerships and collaborative efforts. Very important to the success of this vision is the ability to coordinate with policy makers, non-profits, businesses, the travel industry, land trusts and many other highly valued partners.

California State Parks welcomes your suggestions and feedback. For more information on how you can provide suggestions or comment on the Department’s Central Valley Vision, please call the Planning Division at 916 653-9901 or visit www.parks.ca.gov/centralvalley.

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